

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Project GRAD Houston

Application ID 13AC145197

Program Name: GRADuation Pathways

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The area needs are compelling and supported by statistical documentation of the measure of educational success in Texas. College completion of three cohorts of 8th graders demonstrated that from 8th grade population, only 11.4% of African-Americans and 11.6% of Hispanics received any kind of postsecondary degree.

(+) The applicant provides persuasive evidence that the identified needs exist in the targeted community due to the barriers of lack of financial assistance (families lack the knowledge how to navigate financial resources), post-secondary enrollment (only 35% adults over the age of 25 ever enrolled) and post-secondary persistence (students struggle after enrolled)

(+) The applicant provided specific and current research which supports the need for quality public education for students in economically disadvantaged communities through intensive college access and success programs promoting student and community engagement. The research supports the identified need and proposed solution to meeting the need.

(+) The target population is clearly defined as low-income African-American and Hispanic youth. This population is well-described as economically disadvantaged. The applicant demonstrates that this underserved Hispanic population grew by 52% and 15% in African-American populations, according to the 2010 census.

(+) The application provides clear documentation of the community problems to be addressed, focusing on getting students to enroll in post-secondary education and improved attainment of post-secondary degrees.

(+) The applicant clearly describes the economically disadvantaged aspect of their targeted community. There is 20.5% of adults have less than a ninth grade education, which is much greater than the 6% nationally.

(+) The applicant provides a clear description of the target community as economically disadvantaged, 97% minority (Hispanic and African-American) and 90% low-income.

- (+) The applicant provides an excellent description as to why the target minority/low-income population was selected, based on the need for student guidance. The program will encourage students to focus on education by increasing access to college and promoting student success and support throughout the college experience.
- (+) The application thoroughly documents the AmeriCorps members' activities, roles and responsibilities to provide direct guidance to high school students, and guidance during a summer college institute where high school students experience college life.
- (+) The applicant provides specific examples of Member activities, i.e., Members will provide financial aid workshops, FAFSA/TASFA assistance, college investigations, career investigations, scholarship applications and essays, and college fairs.
- (+) The applicant states that with AmeriCorps involvement, they will provide services to many of the 2000+ students enrolled in college as compared to current guidance for 450 students annually. AmeriCorps involvement is anticipated to yield a 34% or 450 student increase in college enrollment and a 25% or 120 student increase in timely college graduations over three years.
- (+) The applicant provides a clear description that AmeriCorps members will provide additional guidance beyond the availability of staff as well as support for College Institutes, with the goal of an additional 450 students enrolling in college.
- (+) The applicant provided a good job description of what the organization will accomplish with the AmeriCorps members by clearly stating that the current program is limited in reach due to lack of staff and that AmeriCorps members will be able to reach 2000+ students.
- (+) The application provides a clear description of 25 AmeriCorps members who will provide guidance in college access and success in addition to supporting high schools and postsecondary education institutions in Houston and six other cities. The request includes nine full-time Members to support high school students and nine full-time, three half-time, and four quarter-time Members--using these flexible time positions to support already-enrolled college students.
- (+) Logically, full-time Members will be recruited to provide year round support to Project GRAD Houston. Part-time AmeriCorps members will be recruited to support university-based summer College Institutes and other college-based activities which are short in duration.
- (+) The application thoroughly describes how the interventions are evidence-informed due to significant increases in college enrollment, persistence, and graduation over the past 20 years. For example, the applicant describes a high school with the lowest drop-out rates as experiencing a doubling in graduation rates and a 425% increase in college enrollment following Project GRAD assistance.
- (+) The applicant demonstrates that the interventions of AmeriCorps members have measurable community impact based on prior years of experience. The applicant has a history of having sent 6,000 low-income students to college over the past decade. AmeriCorps members will be involved in the same activities of intensive college access that the applicant has used for the past decade.

(+) This program will have a great impact on the targeted communities. There will be created an ongoing desire of future generations to attend postsecondary institutions and will create a better financial situation for multiple communities.

(+) The applicant provides an excellent description of the community impact by discussing the success of the program and providing data showing that program helped increase graduation rates by 70% and tripled college enrollment.

(+) The applicant describes how they will measure impact of the program through the number of students enrolled in higher education, as confirmed through a number of specific, reliable sources such as National Student Clearinghouse data and via PGH scholarship students.

(+) The applicant thoroughly describes how the proposed interventions will have a measurable community impact by indicating that individual interventions will lead to increased graduation rates, college enrollment (for 34%) and a 25% increase in college graduations among those served.

(+) The applicant expects to see an increase in the number of students who will attend postsecondary institutions by participating in their program. This described the increase with the financial status of the targeted communities.

(+) The applicant provided a good description of its program success from the previous year while using that information to determine performance measure targets for this cycle.

(-) The description of the number of AmeriCorps members requested was unclear with no consistency; as it stated 20.59 AmeriCorps members in the Executive Summary and the total number was mentioned as 25 and 35, with many types of slots described.